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Greek Journalists Sentenced For Using Tapes of Wiretap

ATHENS, April 26 (AP) — The publisher and the editor of the newspaper with the largest circulation in Greece were sentenced Thursday to five months' imprisonment on charges arising from the wiretapping of an office used by The New York Times in Athens.

George Bobolas, 59 years old, the publisher of the daily Ethnos, was sentenced in absentia after he did not appear in court, citing poor health. The editor, Alexander Filipopoulos, 57, was in court and pleaded not guilty.

The court ruled that the two could avoid going to jail by paying a fine equivalent to about \$500 each. If they want to appeal the conviction, the court said, they can remain free pending a ruling.

The two were convicted of making illegal use of telephone conversations. The court acquitted the two men of carrying out the wiretapping themselves, saying there was insufficient evidence of this.

Two-Year Legal Battle

If convicted on the wiretapping charge, the two could have faced terms of five years in prison.

The sentences were handed down after a two-year legal battle between Ethnos and Paul Anastasiades, 34, a Cypriot journalist who writes under the name Paul Anastasi. He is a correspondent for The Daily Telegraph of London and a part-time correspondent for The New York Times.

Ethnos published Mr. Anastasiades's conversations with an Athens lawyer in July 1983, a year after the journalist published a book in which he said Ethnos was published in cooperation with the disinformation department of the K.G.B., the Soviet state security agency. Mr. Anastasiades was later sentenced to prison on charges of libel and defamation of Mr. Bobolas, but he appealed and the sentence was annulled last November by the Greek Supreme Court, which ordered a new hearing.

In the wiretapping case, the court president, Ioannis Velissaris, rejected the defense's claim that the newspaper had published the wiretapped conversations "as a national and social duty" to expose a "conspiracy."

Ethnos had asserted that the conversation it published proved that Mr. Anastasiades was planning to murder Ethnos employees and destabilize Greek democracy. After reviewing the conversations, the court dismissed the assertions.

In several articles, the newspaper had asserted that Mr. Anastasiades was a C.I.A. agent and that his book was the product of a "cold war attack on Greece." Mr. Anastasiades has countered with a libel suit against the newspaper.

The court president ruled that explanations Mr. Bobolas and Mr. Filipopoulos had offered of how they had received the tapes were "not very convincing," but that there was insufficient evidence that they had ordered the wiretapping.

Ethnos had reported that it had "tens" of such tapes and that the tapes had been mailed to the newspaper anonymously, "obviously by members of Anastasiades's group of agents who apparently disagreed with the murderous plans of their bosses and decided to warn us against the intentions of this ruthless group."

'Vulgar and Crude Attempt'

Mr. Anastasiades told the Athens court the incident "constituted a vulgar and crude attempt by Ethnos to discredit me personally as well as my revelations on the paper's connections with the K.G.B."

Some months ago, the counsel for the prosecution argued that the Russians had probably tapped the telephones of The New York Times's office and had handed the tapes over for exploitation by Ethnos. The New York Times, which has its own correspondent based in Athens, rents office space from Mr. Anastasiades in the same suite in which he has his office.

The two sides are to confront each other again on May 16. Mr. Bobolas is seeking about \$400,000 as compensation for libel he says Mr. Anastasiades committed in his book, "Take the Nation in Your Hands."

Mr. Anastasiades has countered with a libel suit for about \$1.6 million as damages for the wiretapping and for the articles that have presented him as a foreign agent and terrorist.

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